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**Chapter 4**

**Recreating Memory?**

**The Drama *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* and its Remakes**

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**War Memory and Japanese Media**

*Watashi wa kai ni naritai* (I Want to Be a Shellfish), the story of a soldier unfairly tried for war crimes, is one of Japan’s longest running media franchises. First produced as a television drama by the private station KRT (later called TBS)[[1]](#endnote-1) in 1958, it borrows motifs from the 1953 essay *Kurueru Senpanshikeishū* (A Mad War Criminal on a Death Row) by Katō Tetsutarō (2007), himself a pardoned BC (lesser crimes) class war criminal,[[2]](#endnote-2) and was turned into a film in 1959. After the original drama, TBS remade it in 1994, and later, Nihon TV also jumped on the bandwagon and produced it again in 2007, before the last version, another cinematic adaptation, was released in 2008. In a sense, the material has become a ‘cultural memory’ (Assmann 2006), as it is a narrative that has been handed down the generations without losing relevance. But it is more than that. With new actors and slightly altered storylines, the five manifestations of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* are also perfect vehicles for analysing how Japan’s mass media and its postwar history have developed in tandem and how the memory of the war has changed within that time.

What elements make this narrative so fascinating that it has entered the Japanese collective consciousness to such a large extent? Unlike the original essay, which conveys the thoughts of a man who has been sentenced to death because he did not give prisoners of war medication that he himself might not even have had (Katō 2007), the visual adaptations deal with the life of a barber, drafted into the war and tried for a crime he committed under orders from his superior officers. Therefore, it offers an explanation of how so many atrocities, which might seem inconceivable to anyone not involved with the war, could have occurred. It also shows that not all Japanese were ‘bad’ to the core; that ordinary soldiers had somehow slipped into committing crimes because they could not disobey orders. Thus, this material is very relevant when it comes to looking at how Japan has come to understand its actions during the war – and how this coming to terms has been represented in a franchise that stretches over five decades.

While the past is always in the present (Gluck 1993), the memory of World War II is also highly political, never static and always fitted to the contemporary political situation. The politics of memory are particularly visible in the Japanese case, since the memory of the war remains a contested terrain (Seaton 2007). The Japanese have often been criticized for emphasizing only their victimization. The war that the Japanese fought on the Asian mainland is rarely mentioned in the Japanese context, although it has become more present in recent years (Buruma 1995; Igarashi 2000; Schwentker and Saaler 2008; Seaton 2007). Historical narratives of the war in Japan have focused mainly on the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or on the fighting in the Pacific, without taking into account the Japanese crimes committed during World War II – in this respect, *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* is significantly different, as it does deal with arbitrary killings and how they were dealt with during the war crimes trials.

Consequently, if one looks at the popular media, one might expect to see only the least controversial discourses, as both television and film need to attract audiences and thus will seldom be radical (Duncan 1994). Within such a restrictive medium as television, drama is considered to be particularly tame – and tends to shy away from topics that are too contentious. This has not always been the case: in the early days of Japanese television, dramas were often political and confronted Japan’s wartime past head on. The first version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* is one such drama. However, the boom of controversial dramas was to be short-lived; in 1961 protests by sponsors, who then practically ruled over private broadcasting stations,[[3]](#endnote-3) resulted in one drama never being aired although it had already been produced (Hirahara 1991). That the television station in question had avoided conflict and simply shelved the drama opened Pandora’s box, and more and more critical programmes vanished in the aftermath (ibid.). However, taking a historical perspective, the first version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* still is of particular importance because it was broadcast when television was but five years old, and the relationship to politics was not yet as cosy as it became in the later years. The second version was produced directly after the Tsubaki Incident[[4]](#endnote-4) of 1993, and we might assume that this could have made an impression on the production. The third televised production was broadcast in 2007 to yet another generation – again, we might expect the representation to be different, as the temporal distance from World War II had increased.

Despite this passing of time and in spite of the focus being on societal issues, World War II has not vanished from the small screen. Every now and then, mostly in relation to an anniversary, it is the subject of a drama (Seaton 2007). The second television adaptation of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai*, produced in 1994, shortly before the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, is an example. However, the 2007 version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* was not produced for any anniversary, and the material became another film in 2008, making a total of five different productions of the story. With the latter two, the distance from the Tsubaki Incident is also significant enough that they offer scholars the opportunity to ask whether or not the representations have changed and whether they have taken a moral critical stance. Therefore, looking at a story that deals with war crimes and that has been remade five times in two different media could illuminate significant instances in the appropriation process of this controversial topic over time and lead to the question of whether it is truly correct that television (drama) always goes for the least controversial representation.

In contrast to television, cinema is generally considered to be the medium where there is more ‘freedom’ (Richie 2001) in terms of having more artistic leeway. In 1959, when the first adaptation of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* was produced, Japanese cinema still had a larger audience share than television (Nojiri 1991) and was technically more advanced. Cinema audiences declined with the rise of television, as they did elsewhere, and slowly but gradually the studio system in which ‘big bosses’ dominated what was being produced vanished. Television became the hot spot for stars, and although studio bosses had prohibited their stars from appearing on the small screen at first, they now had to vie for audiences and to look for different sources of income to avert bankruptcy (Richie 2001).

With only a few studios surviving, each sought their niche, and today hardly a Japanese blockbuster film is produced without the backing of a major TV station. Stars now cross media, but to be a star you have to have made it on TV (Painter 1996). Thus, in contrast to the first cinematic adaptation, the second version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* was co-produced with TBS and with stars mainly known through their televised appearances.

Rather than just looking at television productions, this chapter will attempt to work out how the material was adapted for the small and big screens, taking into account how the adaptations developed and what implications this may have had for the media as such, but also what it may reveal about the social and political situation at the time of production. Katō’s original essay shall not be looked at, as other than the now famous final sentences of the drama – namely that the barber would like to be a shellfish if reborn – the visual versions and the essay bear little resemblance.

**The ‘Simple Man’ – *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* 1958**

The drama *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* was the highlight of 1958. Awarded the prestigious *Geijutsusai* (Art Festival) Prize by the Ministry of Education, it was also technologically innovative, as it was one of the first dramas to use video recording, hence it was a milestone in the increasing quality of this medium (Hirahara 1991). What is it that makes this drama worthy of attention, aside from its artistic value and technical achievement? The story is simple enough. Shimizu Toyomatsu (Sakai Frankie), the main character, is a barber in a small town on the island of Shikoku and a person who would not hurt a fly. Yet there is a war going on, one that for him is distant until he is drafted. During his training, he becomes part of a home defence unit – and as such, is asked to go looking for American pilots who have been shot down and to ‘dispose’ (*shobun*) of them, even though as prisoners of war they are protected by international law. When his unit finds the Americans, Shimizu (who has been the target of his superior’s bullying due to his not very soldierly behaviour), is ordered to stab one of the pilots. Going against his conscience, and coerced by his superior officers, he complies with the order.

When the war ends, Shimizu returns to his former life and, like everybody else, happily abuses the military elites that had led them all into trouble. Suddenly, he is arrested for the murder of the pilot and tried as a war criminal. During the trial, in which he struggles to make himself understood and to show how he had been forced to execute the order, Shimizu is vilified by an American judge, who always is shot from a low angle (thus making him overwhelming) and behind a desk (evoking distance and authority) and is convinced that Shimizu wanted to kill the pilot. He doubts that there ever was an order to kill a POW, and, if so, there would be written evidence. Shimizu becomes enraged at this accusation and replies that the judge knows nothing about Japan. In the end, Shimizu is sentenced to death for having followed orders.

The execution of his sentence takes him by surprise, as he had relied on the success of an appeal made for him by Yano, the superior officer from whom the order originated. His final words in a letter to his wife are that he wants to be a shellfish if reborn, not a horse or a cow, because these are also bullied by humans; a shellfish because he then would live at the bottom of the sea without having to worry about war.

In the drama, the perspective of an ‘ordinary soldier’ is assumed, making Shimizu the centre of focus and attention. All the officers that appear are somewhat distant, except for Yano, who feels responsible for having issued the order. After Yano’s apology and assurance that he is writing an appeal to get him freed, Shimizu warms to him, and the two start an unlikely friendship. However, Shimizu is also depicted as representative of his generation. Drafted into a war he supported *as a citizen*, he ends up being made responsible for having acted against his conscience *as a soldier*. In this respect, the drama can thus be regarded as an apologetic legitimization of Japanese soldiers’ actions during the war but also shifts the blame towards the military elite that made ordinary Japanese do horrible things. Hence, it raises the question of who bears the ultimate responsibility for the war and what the personal guilt of each individual might be, thereby turning Shimizu into a ‘tragic hero’[[5]](#endnote-5) who dies for the wrong cause. Shimizu’s final statement is a pacifist one, highlighting how the war had become hated among the immediate post-war generation – and how the Peace Constitution was promoted in the media.

Broadcast in 1958, only thirteen years after the war’s end, the drama seemingly hit a nerve with audiences, consisting of people able to sympathize with Shimizu, as they could presumably see themselves in him – and could recall how they had been treated during and after the war. The drama is thus in line with the national discourse on victimization, but Shimizu is doubly victimized: by the Americans for having him stand trial in an unfair way (there is no evidence that he even has a lawyer) and by his superiors, acting as *pars pro toto* for the Japanese military elite.

Examining the trial scenes in particular, and the representation of the Americans throughout, the political message of the drama becomes clear. During the trial, all Japanese are shown in full shot, telling the judge about the order and how they dealt with it. So, a superior officer, who takes responsibility for having been vague, and middle-ranking and petty officers, who uneasily answer that they had just ‘passed on’ the order, all appear in turn before Shimizu, who was forced to execute it. Unlike the others, his interrogation is actually shown. All the questions that he is asked are in English – and the translator does not do a very good job,[[6]](#endnote-6) as the translations of the judge’s questions as well as Shimizu’s answers are badly converted into the respective target language. Shimizu’s well-meant explanations that any order from a superior officer was like an order from the Emperor and that he did not have a choice are lost on the judge – and in translation. Thus, the trial becomes a farce. This representation is very much in line with how the Tokyo Trials were viewed in 1958, as it appeared to be an example of victors’ justice because the Americans did not truly make an effort to understand the plight of Japanese ordinary soldiers and their being caught up in having to execute orders they did not approve of. Behind this, there is also a subtle critique, namely about the fact that the person who was at the centre of it all, the Emperor, did not stand trial. An audience in 1958, remembering the war and with the debates about the role of the Emperor still in their minds, would have been able to read this message.

Furthermore, in a second scene set in prison, Shimizu and Yano, the superior officer who gave the order to kill the pilots, discuss the creation of the keisatsu yobitai(The Special Police Force created in 1950),[[7]](#endnote-7) the predecessor of the jieitai(Japanese Self-Defence Forces, JSDF). Yano issues a subtle warning, namely that he would want those who had founded the keisatsu yobitai to see how military commands might conflict with people’s consciences, especially if they have to be forced to follow them. Although these thoughts are lost on Shimizu, he nonetheless comments that Yano is certain to have a leading position again, subtly criticizing the keisatsu yobitai for being nothing more than a successor to the Imperial Army, another discussion at the forefront of the 1958 audience’s minds. In the end, Shimizu is hanged just as rumours about an amnesty fly about, making his demise particularly tragic. In a voice-over, Shimizu reads out the words that he would want to be a shellfish if reborn.

**Adapting the Narrative for a Mass Audience – The 1959 Cinematic Version**

The first version for the big screen was produced just a year later. It is quite clearly more like a copy than a remake, as some actors are cast in the same roles, most notably Sakai, who again plays Shimizu. At that time, cinema was technically better than television, so from a purely visual point of view, the film version makes the TV drama look ‘old’ and rather sloppily done.

Consequently, as the 1958 drama was fairly successful – and the material valuable and important – the cinematic adaptation was less about competing with the original drama and more about making it available to a larger audience. Nonetheless, there are notable differences in the story and plot. Although most of the dialogue is identical, the trial scene and Shimizu’s time in prison differ considerably. Again, he struggles to make himself understood, but this time he has a lawyer who steps in when the prosecutor’s interrogation goes too far, thereby making the trial look less arbitrary, and a lot fairer. Also, during his time in prison, Shimizu does not sit back and wait for the outcome of Yano’s appeal but actively writes appeals himself with the help of his lawyer. He is by no means as passive and submissive as in the 1958 version but very active and very outspoken about being sentenced to death without actually having done anything wrong.

These are not the only notable differences between the two versions. While in the TV drama the Americans remain distant and one-dimensional, one of the guards in the cinema version is very friendly towards the prisoners, giving them cigarettes and passing messages between them. In his first talk with Yano, Shimizu actually says that there are ‘kind people among the Americans, too’, a statement that would have been out of place in the televised version because the Americans appear too distant. It could be argued that remaking this material as a film led to a considerably whitewashed version with softer messages. One possible reason for this is certainly that it had to attract as many people as possible – and hence it would not have been a good idea to be too controversial. Turning the messages into something as soft as this shows that at that time cinema was the medium that attracted more people than television, which apparently allowed for more radical representations by the latter.[[8]](#endnote-8)

**Fighting for One’s Life – The 1994 Version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai***

What about the first televised remake? On the cover of the 1995 video tape, the drama is advertised with the catchphrase ‘*sensō no shinjitsu o anata wa shitteimasu ka*’ (Do You Know the Truth about the War?), thus clearly addressing a generation that did not have first-hand knowledge of the war, unlike the audiences of the previous versions. The plots of the 1958 and 1994 dramas are identical, even the dialogue is more or less the same, give or take a few lines. However, there are also striking differences. While the 1958 drama contextualizes the Tokyo war crimes trial – in the first few minutes we see former prime minister and general Tōjō Hideki, among others, being sentenced to death – the 1994 version contextualizes all the war, starting with Japan’s attacks on Shanghai and Pearl Harbour, the Battle of Midway and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Another difference is in the characterization of Shimizu, this time played by the comedian Tokoro Jōji. While in the 1958 drama version Shimizu remains passive, relying on an appeal being made by Yano, Shimizu is again more active and writes to President Truman to explain his situation, similar to the cinematic adaptation of 1959. Consequently, rather than sitting back and waiting for events to unfold, he tries to influence their outcome and prevent the execution of his sentence. That it is to no avail makes him also a tragic hero (see also Standish 2000), but it is important to the message of the drama. Again, Shimizu becomes a victim of the military elite in both countries. Additionally, the idea of victimization is further enforced by actually showing the bombing of Hiroshima and other air raids.

Together with this, the representation of the Americans also differs notably. In the 1958 televised version, they are overwhelming and distant; they tend to treat Shimizu brutally and are indifferent to Japanese culture. In the 1959 movie, they are friendly and helpful, whereas in the 1994 adaptation they are playful but slightly childish characters. In particular, the prison guards are no longer brutal wardens but enjoy having fun, even with their prisoners. Additionally, Shimizu actually learns some English in order to communicate with them, something he did not do in the 1958 version.

A lot had happened in between 1958 and 1994. In 1958, TV drama was still a very political genre, but in 1994, TV Asahi had just been punished for meddling too much in politics, and so some of the edge has gone from the original version, such as the harsh stance in representing the Americans. The ‘ugly American’ was no longer part of the contemporary discourse, as after many years of an intense US-Japan relationship it was not possible to depict the Americans as too large a threat. Furthermore, 1990s audiences might have found it difficult to relate to someone as passive as the Shimizu that was portrayed in the 1958 version, since the war drama genre had seen more proactive characters. However, due to the fact that the air raids are shown more often, victimization also becomes more present than in the 1958 version – which shows that this view of World War II had become much more prevalent in the decades in between. Shimizu remains doubly the victim of his superiors and the American judges, but another layer is added to that double victimization, namely that all of the Japanese suffered from the air raids carried out by the Americans, thus possibly making the order that Shimizu received easier to understand for the 1990s audiences.

**Always the Others** *–* ***Watashi wa kai ni naritai*****2007**

The newest televised remake is, strictly speaking, a non-remake. Produced by Nihon TV in 2007, it is the story of Katō Tetsutarō, the author of the essay from which the three previous versions borrowed their title. The reason why it has to be included is that it makes clear allusions to the other versions and it should therefore be seen in line with them. Even the title *Shinjitsu no shuki. BC-kyū senpan Katō Tetsutarō. Watashi wa kai ni naritai* (A True Record. The BC class war criminal Katō Tetsutarō. I Want to be a Shellfish) puts it in clear line with the two productions by KRT/TBS but promises more than that; namely, to give us a true record of it all, again by borrowing motifs from the essay as well as the preceding dramas/films. Additionally, the phrase *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* is supposed to ring a bell with the audiences, who would expect a story similar to the previous versions, thus at the same time ensuring good ratings.

Unlike Shimizu, Katō (played by the Kabuki actor Nakamura Shidō II) is a well-educated man. He gets drafted into the army after working for a trading company in China and becomes part of a platoon that is sent out to find Chinese resistance fighters. When they come across a youngster who can only stammer in Chinese that he is no resistance fighter and innocent, Katō translates it for his superiors. They, however, think Katō is crossing the line and start abusing him. Like Shimizu, Katō is given an illegitimate order – to kill the Chinese civilian – which he refuses to obey. When someone else executes the order, Katō has to be dragged away by other men, as he wants to prevent the execution of the boy by all means possible. From that, we jump onwards to 1944, when Katō has become a commander in a POW camp in Niigata. He treats his American prisoners kindly and tries to support them wherever he can.

One day, shortly before the end of the war, one prisoner is shot, possibly while trying to escape – it remains unclear whether it was an accident or done on purpose by one of the guards. As superior officer, Katō takes responsibility for it and goes on the run because he is certain that he will be tried as a war criminal. Reading a newspaper, he learns that his unit has received relatively light punishments, which he takes to mean that the Americans will sentence him to death once they get hold of him.

When he is finally arrested, Katō is indeed sentenced to death. There are notable differences in his trial from the fictional adaptations because Katō just remains silent when his verdict is pronounced, knowingly taking on full responsibility for an act that he neither ordered nor approved of. Even though he is fluent in English, he does not defend himself and waits patiently for his execution, sacrificing himself for the wellbeing of his subordinates.

In his stead, his younger sister starts to fight for his life. Tirelessly, she compiles a file of statements from the soldiers in the camp in which her brother served and finally brings it to General Douglas MacArthur in order to get her brother’s case reopened. Eventually, Katō’s sentence is changed to lifelong imprisonment, and he is pardoned after the end of the Occupation in 1952. In the final scene, which is set in present-day Japan, Katō’s sister and one of the prisoners in Katō’s camp shake hands over his grave, and we learn that Katō has died after a lifetime spent working to promote Japanese-American relations.

The trial scene, especially, is depicted very much the same as in the previous versions, and anyone knowing the older versions would immediately recognize it. However, there are also some differences. In the 2007 version, unlike in the previous accounts, it does pay to be active; even General MacArthur is shown as approachable and willing to interfere in order to prevent the execution of an unfair sentence, thus softening the rather harsh messages of the previous versions considerably.

It is interesting to see how far the narrative has come. Shimizu has no choice but to execute the order to stab the American and says he would have been shot if he had not; Katō is free to refute an order without facing charges – and even ends up as a commanding officer. The judges in Katō’s trial condemn the one who had ostensibly given the order to shoot the prisoner while letting all his subordinates off the hook. Consequently, the verdict seems fairer and more understandable. In the end, Katō is an honest character without any edges; he is innocent to the last and endures (*gaman*) until he is released from prison. It is always the others that commit crimes and never the hero, while in the previous versions, the heroes are forced to act against their conscience and thus become ‘tainted’. While Katō’s way of being certainly makes him more approachable for a present-day audience, it is also strongly idealized.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The role of the Americans also differs decisively. They seem friendlier and open towards the Japanese and are not characterized as a threat. Thus, the two countries seem to be on a more equal standing than in the other versions, with reconciliation and a common future as the possible political messages.

Even though this drama is not a ‘remake’ in the strictest sense, many motifs are still shared across the three versions. Yet all of them allow us to see how the memory of World War II has changed from being a narrative of ‘guilt’ and ‘responsibility’ to a softened, easily digestible drama in which ‘anything goes’ and the blame lies always with the others.

**An Innocent Man – The 2008 Movie**

The most recent remake of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* returns to the original TV drama. Produced by Geneon Universal and TBS, it is a clear example that blockbusters rarely are made without a major TV station in the background. Starring the boy band SMAP’s leader Nakai Masahiro alongside Nakama Yukie, both already famous through their appearances on television,[[10]](#endnote-10) it shows how much the lines between various media are blurring. Furthermore, apart from more panoramic shots, there are hardly any differences from the 2007 television film, even when it comes to the camerawork.

Casting Nakai, publicly perceived to be a ladies’ man, already makes Shimizu a different character when compared to the portrayals of Sakai and Tokoro, or even Nakamura, offering the possibility of identification with a star who is a well-known (television) persona to whom people can relate (Horton and Wohl 1956); and also sympathy for the character in this particular situation. Unlike the other versions, Shimizu has a limp and is actually unfit for service. Nonetheless, he is drafted. Furthermore, rather than just remaining at the back and watching, he bravely stands up to his superior’s bullying in order to save his friend Takita[[11]](#endnote-11) during military training – only to become the new target for harassment. However, as it turns out, during his training, Shimizu does not quite have the knack when it comes to wielding a bayonet; he always misses the area that he is supposed to stab. Hidaka, the captain in charge of his unit, is much more adept at it and shows him how to do it properly.

This leads to a completely different outcome when it comes to the actual stabbing. When Takita and Shimizu are ordered to execute the two Americans who are tied to a cross in front of a Buddhist temple – the scene now looking like a clash of religions – it all seems to parallel the previous versions. Shimizu and Takita are bullied into following the order, but after the trial it turns out that Shimizu – as usual unable to wield the bayonet – had injured the American but did not kill him. The next morning, the American is found stabbed to death but not by Shimizu, hence leaving the audience to assume that it had probably been Hidaka. Thus, Shimizu is completely innocent, not just for having followed the order without wanting to but for not killing the American in the first place, making the miscarriage of justice even worse than in the other versions.

The trial scene as such, however, differs only in nuances. Again, the Americans are filmed from below, giving them a slightly threatening appearance, and again, they make fun of Shimizu’s well-meant explanations and condemn him for a crime that he did not even commit. Strangely, there is no further mention of this in the film, and the plot proceeds as in the other examples.

He also begins a friendship with Yano, the superior officer who had given the order – but there is no subtle criticism at all. Although it is said that the best thing about the new Constitution is that in it Japan renounces the right of belligerency (markedly, he does not say that Japan should not have an army, the JSDF have probably become too accepted), the criticism that any order leads to moral dilemmas is no longer heard. The scene ends with Yano saying that he would like the public to see that the vast majority of the A class war criminals were people like Shimizu – clearly making it more apologetic than the previous versions. Furthermore, when Yano is executed, his last words to his executioners are a criticism of the Americans’ actions during the war, rhetorically asking them whether or not it was also a crime to destroy civilian homes, taking lives by the thousands. To add to this, a firestorm raging in a city and many burnt-out cityscapes are also shown. Compared to this, Yano’s crime (a vague order) and Shimizu’s crime (the supposed killing of one American pilot) seem insignificant.

However, the film does not only include an accusation aimed at the Americans, as in the 1959 cinema version, there also is one friendly guard who supports his prisoners wherever he can. When Shimizu is finally executed, the guard can barely conceal his tears. This is probably to show that there are also good and bad people among the Americans; it does not necessarily take away the sharpness of the accusation, nor does it help to minimize the American crimes. Audiences are thus invited to make this comparison; namely, that the Americans have got away with supposedly much greater crimes, whereas they charged the Japanese for supposedly much lesser crimes, possibly evoking the feeling that they are morally unfit to judge. This film thus turns every possible progressive view present in the original version completely upside down – and the narrative has changed from being a drama that subtly critiqued the war to a conservative representation, putting Japan’s victimization at the forefront. Shimizu’s innocence merely adds to that.

**Conclusion**

Comparing the three dramas and two films with each other, it is clear that the narrative has changed a great deal. From a subtly critical, haunting tale of a man forced to act against his conscience, who subsequently is caught up in a miscarriage of justice; via two tragic heroes who do everything in their power to be freed but are hanged nonetheless; to two innocent heroes, one of whom emerges from the war as upright and honest as before while the other has to die. Whether or not this can be read as how Japan has reinterpreted its history in recent years[[12]](#endnote-12) may be open to debate.

However, what does become clear is that history, or memory, can be a commodity – and that the appropriation of this commodity can change according to the needs of the generation for which the dramas and films are produced, thus mirroring mainstream discourses. For a generation that needed to come to terms with their own actions during the war and whose memory of it was then still fresh, the historical context was not so important; what was needed was a drama that helped explain how the atrocities could have happened. For an audience in 1994 that had no idea what war felt like, the producers aimed to create a drama promising its audiences to tell the ‘truth’ about the war but was in line with the then dominant discourse of the Japanese as victims of the war. Finally, for an even more distant generation, it was possible not only to show the killing of Chinese civilians, a much contested memory in Japan that has long been shunned in public discourse, but also soldiers who acted morally; therefore, constructing the image that the war may not have been so bad, as at least some people remained upright, honourable and ‘truly Japanese’. Finally, in making Shimizu an innocent man and in directly comparing the actions of Japanese and American soldiers, it shows that the discourse of victimization is the only one left – and that Japan has gathered enough self-confidence to stand up against anybody claiming differently, at least in the media.

Furthermore, the *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* versions also clearly map the shifting images of the Americans in Japan’s post-war period. They range from a portrayal of dominant victors via more human, slightly childish and *nihonjinron*-influenced characters to one in which audiences can actually feel superior to their US partners. For these audiences, the war does not matter anymore and everything is forgiven. In a way, the friendly guard is a concession to that image, but when it comes to war memories in the final version, it is now Japan that accuses America of not confronting its past. Thus, each drama is firmly located in the political discourse of the time in which it was produced.

Fiske (1987) has argued that each member of the audience ‘reads’ the message of the drama that is available to them vis-à-vis their background. Certainly, one could argue that the five different versions seem to go for the least controversial representation – it is just that what constitutes a controversial topic has changed over time. But there is more to the material in terms of potential for progressive thought. In the first version, television could afford to be radical – and film could not. By 1994, this had changed, and TV had become the more popular medium and hence came under more scrutiny. In 2008, the most apologetic version of all is produced in the seemingly more open medium of film, albeit with the involvement of television. *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* hence also maps the media history of Japan, showing what the dominant discourse was in which medium at which time.

Every message carried in the media is open to different interpretations, and, indeed, we do not mean to imply that there is a single audience with a single background. When it comes to the policies of memory regarding the war, one may find considerable differences even within the establishment. Consider the differences between Emperor Akihito’s address and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō’s speech in the commemoration of the 70 years since the end of the war in 2015. While the first expressed unmistakable deep remorse, the latter resorted to long-winded analogies with the colonial projects of Western powers to rationalize how Japan had every right to pursue such colonial endeavours as well. While public opinion is admittedly an abstraction, the JSDF have earned a widely shared favourable consideration thanks to their performance during national emergencies such as the Hanshin and Tōhoku earthquakes (1995, 2011). Many of the ideas that Abe Shinzō wanted to push during his 2006–7 term as prime minister (when he clamoured in the Diet for a Japanese rewriting of the Allied-imposed Constitution) seem more and more feasible – especially when it comes to calling a referendum that might do away with Article 9’s provision that ‘land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained’. On the other hand, polls still show that the Japanese citizenship is quite adamant about protecting the pacifist spirit also enshrined in Article 9: ‘the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes’.

*Watashi wa kai ni naritai* reveals, to paraphrase Nietzsche (2009), that history and memory are indeed man-made, always serving the needs of the living and allowing us to forget and remember whatever is needed whenever it is needed. What is crucial in this respect is thus what is remembered and what is forgotten. In the course of the fifty years in-between the broadcasting of the first and the last version of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai*, the Japanese memory of the war and how these memories are dealt with changed. From an accusation aimed at the Japanese military elite to an accusation concerning the Americans, with the Japanese elites remaining kind and upright, the newest productions seem to follow a need to establish a link with the past, to allow younger generations to see what dilemmas their ancestors had faced.[[13]](#endnote-13) Again, it highlights that the media do not necessarily represent historical fact (Creeber 2001) rather they can convey a certain ideology (Fiske 1987). In that sense, television becomes a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), a site of remembrance, as politically influenced as are other such sites, with its representations always recreated to fit the concurrent politics of memory.

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**Filmography**

*Watashi wa Kai ni Naritai* (I Want to be a Shellfish), Japan, KRT (now TBS), 1958 [DVD].

*Watashi wa Kai ni**Naritai* (I Want to be a Shellfish), dir. S. Hashimoto, Japan, Toho Company, 1959 [DVD].

*Watashi wa Kai ni Naritai (I Want to be a Shellfish), Japan, TBS, 1994 [VHS].*

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*Watashi wa Kai ni Naritai* (I Want to be a Shellfish), dir. K. Fukuzawa, Japan, Geneon Universal and TBS, 2008 [DVD].

**Notes**

1. . KRT is short for Kabushikigaisha Rajio Tōkyō, Radio Tokyo Corporation. In 1960, KRT was renamed Tokyo Broadcasting Systems, TBS, the name by which it is still known. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. . The Tokyo war crimes trial grouped soldiers by severity of their crimes, with the A class reserved for the highest ranking soldiers and those most incriminated in war crimes. The classification BC would hence refer to a war criminal who had committed lesser crimes but still was facing at least an extended prison sentence. On the Tokyo war crimes trial, see Totami (2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. . Japanese television operates within a dual system of public and private broadcasting stations. The public broadcasting station Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK for short) is solely financed by licence fees, whereas private television stations have to look for revenue from commercials and sponsorship of programmes. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. . This refers to an event 1993, when the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost the election for the Lower House for the first time since their formation in 1955. The then Prime Minister, Miyazawa Ki’ichi, was over 70 when he stood for re-election. His opponent was the much younger Hosokawa Morihiro who knew what to do when facing a camera. Challenged by the journalists on the popular private station TV Asahi, Miyazawa made promises he could never keep – and did not make a good impression. The journalists Kume Hiroshi and Tahara Sōichirō, known for their outspoken manner, rhetorically asked the audiences whether they truly wanted to be governed by someone like this – and when the LDP lost the election, it was put down to their influence. To make matters worse, Kume’s and Tahara’s superior, Tsubaki Sadayoshi, admitted during a private meeting that he had given them corporate backing and that he was glad that the influence of television was so great that the outcome of the election had been altered and the LDP had lost power. When this news broke, the LDP threatened to revoke the broadcasting licence of TV Asahi (which coincidentally had been up for renewal), saying that the station had violated the broadcasting laws. Tsubaki apologized and resigned – and TV Asahi got their license renewed. Without Tsubaki’s statement, Kume’s and Tahara’s outspoken-ness could have been put down to Freedom of Speech; with the statement, it became a problem. This event, commonly known as the *Tsubaki hatsugen jiken* (Tsubaki Statement Incident), is now firmly in every textbook on Japanese media (see Altman 1996 and Sugiyama 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. . See also Centeno’s Chapter 2 and Treglia’s Chapter 5 in this volume. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. . For audiences in 1958, this would have been evident only for a few people whose English was good enough to understand that translation and original did not match. However, the Japanese sentences the interpreter uses to convey the questions to Shimizu are short and in very simple Japanese, so it is clear, even without understanding English, that something is going wrong during the interrogation. Likewise, when he translates Shimizu’s answers into English he also only uses short sentences. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. . The keisatsu yobitaiwas legally only a police force but quickly became an armed force and was subsequently renamed the Japanese Self-Defence Forces. The Constitution of 1947 does not permit Japan to have an army, but with the growing threat of communism in Asia it became clear that if Japan was to be a stronghold against communism in Asia, it also had to have an army. The keisatsu yobitai were a way around this dilemma, but the constitutional problems remain to this day (see, for example, Frühstück 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. . According to the Internet Movie Database, the film was only released in the U Sin 1971, so it was not made with foreign audiences in mind, at least not initially (information retrieved 16 December 2012 from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0202919/releaseinfo). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. . In conducting an internet search for Katō, contrasting narratives emerge. English sources describe him as a brutal commander of the camp in Niigata (see Hadley 2012 and NCM 2012), whereas Japanese sources mainly refer to various versions of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* – except for Wikipedia, where an account of his life can be easily found (http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%8A%A0%E8%97%A4%E5%93%B2%E5%A4%AA%E9%83%8E, last accessed 28 July 2018). Setting aside obvious problems with Wikipedia, the introduction to the latest edition of his work (Katō 2007), which was written by his sister Fujiko, portrays him as a kind and selfless person. It is hence impossible to assess to what extent this drama takes the liberty of reinterpreting his life, but it would certainly be in line with how his family would have wanted him to be seen. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. . Nakama has starred in many ‘blockbuster’ TV dramas and her face is well known. Nakai is both the leader of the ‘boy group’ SMAP and hosts many talk shows, but he has also made frequent appearances in dramas himself. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. . In all versions that deal with Shimizu, Takita has always been the other soldier to receive the order to stab the second pilot. His sentence, however, is never alluded to, but since they meet up in Sugamo prison in Tokyo, one can assume it is the same. In this particular situation, however, the superior bullies Takita because he has never carried anything really heavy – then Shimizu interferes, saying that he, as a barber, has also never carried anything heavier than scissors. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. . On this notion see in particular McCormack (2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. . The five versions of *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* are not the only examples of this – the 2005 drama *Hiroshima Shōwa 20nen 8gatsu 6ka* also sports essentially modern characters in front of a historical background and is clearly aimed at getting a younger audience to relate to the Japanese wartime past (see Kirsch 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)